

Random Encounters

Dead Guys on Parade

By Dale Donovan



"Hey, that's MY Corpse -- Leave It Alone!"

Observant readers will note that this week's encounter is rated as CR 9, whereas Part 2 of this series detailed an encounter with an abyssal ghoul, which has a CR of 10. Here is the reason: Part 1 detailed a simple, outright attack on the heroic characters; Part 2 dealt more with the undead trying to use subterfuge to convince the PCs that it was a less dangerous variety of undead. The level of subterfuge used by the mysterious master villain who is sending these undead to attack the party increases again this time with the appearance of the corpse-stealing bhut.



The mysterious master villain behind these repeated attacks by the undead on the heroes takes a different tack now that the first two undead sent to kill the PCs have failed. The villain hopes to catch the heroes off their guards. The bhut's plan is as follows.

The bhut journeys to whatever town, base, or citadel the PCs call home. How it reaches here is left to DM's discretion, but the bhut will likely use a freshly killed corpse to move about, since that form protects it from its vulnerability to earth and stone. The bhut avoids contact with the effects of civilization while it travels, moving through difficult terrain as opposed to using roads and so on. As an undead, it needs no food or shelter. Despite its care, however, rumors may arise around the PCs' home of zombies wandering through the woods, scaring livestock or children, or bodies of corpses the bhut abandons might be found as well.

Once the bhut arrives in the area, it begins to study the habits of the heroes: the places they go, the people they visit, the inns they drink at, and so on. As PCs often let their guards down at home, the bhut's first plan is to attack and kill a lone PC, then possess the corpse, and go to the other characters. The pretext is, of course, the horrible attack (by a demon or other suitably fearsome and campaign-appropriate monster or creature) that the lone hero barely fought off. Once the bhut has gathered as many of the PCs as possible near it, it attacks using the animated corpse. This tactic not only continues to protect the bhut from its earth vulnerability, but it also forces the other PCs to attack and "kill" their former PC ally (see "Note" below for more on this). When the body is reduced to 0 hp, the bhut emerges and makes immediate use of its dreadful appearance power as it says (if the DM chooses), "I am sent to destroy you, and so you shall die."

If no opportunity presents itself for the bhut to kill a lone PC, it alters its target to a trusted NPC all the characters know. This NPC may be a lover, a family friend, a mentor, a henchman or apprentice, a relative, an innkeeper, or any other person well known to the heroes. Once the bhut chooses such a target, it attacks and kills it, then animates the corpse to use it to get close enough to the characters to attack. Again, if it can get one of the PCs alone, it then attempts to kill the hero and get back to its original plan.

If a single bhut will not challenge your campaign's heroes, bear in mind that the PCs may not carry all their gear and weapons when they are "at home." Certainly, they'd not be lugging their backpacks full of torches, potions, flint and steel, empty sacks for loot, and so on. Similarly, most folks in cities and even small towns don't wear 50 pounds of armor all day, every day, just to go to the inn. If you don't know what the PCs carry on their person when they are at ease, find out well before the battle with the bhut takes place. After considering this, if a single bhut still lacks the punch you want from this encounter, add a second to the mission of the master villain.

Note: The best-case scenario to play out the one-on-one battle of the PC versus the bhut is for it to take place outside the normal time devoted to your regular game; ask the player of the PC the bhut attacks to come over early that week and resolve the battle before the others arrive. The battle may take some time to resolve, and you don't want to leave the other players with nothing to do while you and one of the players go into another room to roll dice to see who wins and who dies. If you game with folks who are mature enough to keep player knowledge and character knowledge separate, the situation may not be that bad. The other players might vicariously enjoy watching the battle between their friend's PC and the mysterious creature play out at the gaming table. Just make it clear that this is a one-on-one battle (unless you decide otherwise). Also, since this is the third attack by undead creatures, the players may have their characters take special care to protect themselves. The bhut probably waits until the PCs drop their guard, but canny PCs might lure it in by pretending to be vulnerable.

If the PC kills the bhut, then you've helped create a great story of a desperate struggle where a lone PC (likely without at least some of his or her standard adventuring equipment, as mentioned above) bravely destroyed the vile undead thing sent to kill her and all her allies.

If the bhut kills the PC, however, you have a decision to make. If the hero's player is mature enough to handle the situation, ask him to continue to play the character at the next game session. A good roleplayer could have a lot of fun playing the animated corpse of his hero, which is now trying to kill all his former friends. If the player needs a little enticement, perhaps you can offer him something (XP, a minor magic item, and so on) for his next character that convinces him to go along. Once you have the player on board with your plan, explain the bhut's strategy and goal, but do not reveal the true identity of the mastermind villain behind the scheme. It's possible that the bhut doesn't know in detail for whom it's working -- it just wants the chance to kill. If the PCs survive the bhut's attacks and the dead hero somehow is returned to life, it's fine to let the PC remember a few clues (to be devised by DMs as suits their campaigns) about where the bhut came from, a location where it had contact with the mastermind, or a magical code phrase to be spoken under the light of a full moon that allows the bhut to report its progress to the mastermind, and so on.

Bhut: CR 9; Medium undead (incorporeal); HD 8d12; hp 52; Init +4; Spd fly 50 ft. (perfect); AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +4; Grp --; Atk +8 melee touch (1d12/19-20/x3, incorporeal touch); Full Atk +8 melee touch (1d12/19-20/x3, incorporeal touch); SA augmented critical, dreadful appearance, poison; SQ corpsetheft, darkvision 60 ft., earth vulnerability, incorporeal subtype, undead traits; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +5; Str --, Dex 19, Con --, Int 14, Wis 9, Cha 20.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +16, Diplomacy +7, Disguise +16, Intimidate +18, Listen +10, Spot +10, Survival +10; Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Track.

Augmented Critical (Ex): A bhut's bite attack threatens a critical hit on a natural attack roll of 19-20 and deals triple normal damage on a successful critical hit.

Dreadful Appearance (Su): Anyone within 30 feet of a bhut must succeed at a DC 19 Fortitude save or take 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage. A victim can be affected only once by a specific bhut's appearance, but the effects of failing to save against multiple bhuts are cumulative.

Poison (Su): A bhut delivers its poison (Fortitude DC 14 negates) with a successful bite attack. Initial and secondary damage are both 2d6 points of temporary Wisdom damage. Anyone reduced to 0 Wisdom by bhut poison lapses into a coma and dies in 1d4 hours unless the poison is neutralized. A humanoid creature slain in this manner rises as a bhut with the next sunset.

Corpsetheft (Su): As a full-round action, a bhut can possess a humanoid corpse of any size. The body animates immediately and is under the bhut's full control; treat it as a zombie of the appropriate size with the following exceptions: The animated body retains the bhut's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as the bhut's alignment, base attack bonus, hit points, base saving throws, and level and class (if any). Further, the body is not limited to single actions. Also, the bhut's bite still delivers the bhut's poison but the bite itself is no longer a natural attack (-4 penalty on attack rolls). It deals only 1d3 points of damage and it provokes an attack of opportunity. In addition, as long as the bhut inhabits the body, it is not affected by its earth vulnerability, and it does not gain the benefits of its augmented critical or dreadful appearance abilities. If the body is reduced to 0 hit points, the bhut must exit the body and return to its incorporeal state; any damage done to the body is not transferred to the bhut's true form.

Earth Vulnerability (Su): A bhut cannot abide contact with earth or stone when in its incorporeal state, and it cannot pass through such matter without taking 3d6 points of damage per round. Stone and earth weapons deal an additional 1d6 points of damage when they strike an incorporeal bhut, and they do not have a miss chance.

Incorporeal Traits: A bhut is harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, magic weapons, spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities. It has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source, except for force effects or attacks made with ghost touch weapons. It can pass through solid objects, but not force effects, at will. Its attacks ignore natural armor, armor, and shields, but deflection bonuses and force effects work normally against them. An incorporeal creature always moves silently and cannot be heard with Listen checks if it doesn't wish to be.

Undead Traits: An abyssal ghoul is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. It is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage to its physical ability scores, ability drain, energy drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or death from massive damage. It cannot be raised, and resurrection works only if it is willing. Darkvision 60 ft.

Description: A bhut's true form is terrifying to behold. It consists of a humanoid head with red, feral eyes, a mouth full of daggerlike teeth, and a roiling, half-formed body of sickening black smoke

and dank red mist.

Bringing the Parts Together

Assuming the party survives the vicious bhut, it's likely that they make finding the source of these attacks a top priority. Any clues the returned-to-life PC has can set them on the right path. It's now up to DMs to determine how long the quest to find the master villain takes, but let's save that for next week.

Coming in Part 4 of Dead Guys on Parade

There is more than one type of stalker.

[Return to Main Page](#)
